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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the framing of intercultural communication. The paper specifically engages those issues that impinge upon intercultural communication college course offerings--the place of intercultural communication within departments and universities, the reception and expectations in an intercultural communication course, and the socio-political climate into which teachers are thrust and course content is examined. Stating that the purpose of emphasizing these issues is to carefully assess the status of and challenges to intercultural communication, the paper argues that intercultural communication remains an often denigrated intellectual area of communication studies. First the paper addresses the effects of the current debate in the academy and in government over the definition and articulation of American national and cultural identity, noting that intercultural communication instructors must perform their duties with the "culture wars" providing the environmental context. Continuing in this vein, the paper discusses the place of intercultural communication in departments of communication. The paper concludes with the results of a student survey regarding their attitudes about content, concepts, and issues in an intercultural communication class. The results indicate that communication studies majors may not be positive about the content, and perhaps the process, of intercultural communication. If students are not sufficiently convinced of the practical and moral value of communicating cross-culturally and appreciating the reality of diversity, then intercultural communications scholars may need to rethink what they are teaching and how successful it is. (Contains 14 references.) (CR)

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Framing the Beast:

Dilemmas in Intercultural Communication

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Framing the Beast:
Dilemmas in Teaching Intercultural Communication

Several years ago, William Gudykunst, Stella Ting-Toomey, and Richard Wiseman (1991; see also Kim & Gudykunst, 1990) provided sage advice and direction for instructors teaching intercultural communication.[1] In their essay these noted scholars of intercultural communication surveyed the "major issues instructors must face when they teach an introductory course in intercultural communication at any level of instruction" (p. 272). The product of these scholars' observations has no doubt aided those teachers who seek strategies, resources, and timelines for preparing syllabi for intercultural communication courses. Anyone who reads the essay will likely have a useful structural blueprint for developing a course outline.

The emphasis of the essay, however, along with the issues that circumscribe its production and reception by other teachers and researchers also bears some exploration. While Gudykunst et al. recognize the pitfalls and possibilities of teaching intercultural communication, they omit looking at the structural and environmental factors also at play. These formal and informal "outside" factors impinge upon the place, content, and reception of intercultural communication within departments and universities. We now correctly recognize course content choices to be political

but to only focus there often deflects academics from recognizing other political tensions beyond our control.

In this essay I will focus on the framing of intercultural communication. Specifically I will engage those issues that impinge upon intercultural communication course offerings--the place of intercultural communication within department and universities, the reception and expectations an intercultural communication course, and the socio-political climate into which teachers are thrust and course content is examined. The purpose of emphasizing these issues is to carefully assess the status of and challenges to intercultural communication. I bring to this endeavor a perception that intercultural communication remains an often denigrated intellectual area of communication studies and sharing, with Alberto González (1991), the opinion that "a course that was once taught to round out offerings in the communication field is now a controversial social mandate" (p. 46).

Culture Wars and Intercultural Communication

Over the course of the last decade a polyvocal debate over the definition and articulation of American national and cultural identity has raged in the academy, government, as well as popular and high culture. Russell Ferguson (1990, 9) observes that the culture wars arise from challenges to a

romanticized center that serves particular political ends. He notes,

> [T]oo often the alternatives to dominant cultural power have been successfully segregated, so that many different bodies of marginalized creative production exist in uneasy isolation. Such isolation can only contribute to the security of a political power which implicitly defines itself as representative of a stable center around which everything else must be arranged.

The culture wars are thus fought by radicalized ethnic, religious, feminist, racial, and gay voices who articulate frustrations at both their fragmentation and marginalization. They are responded to with a rhetoric of containment dominated by the economic and political elite. This opposition is too simplistically labeled as straight white males. Yet this group of males often fronts a traditionalist camp, articulating conceptions of society and knowledge that is superannuated and improbable for this era. Whether the culture wars encompass curricular issues, welfare reform, gay rights, affirmative action, immigration, reproductive rights, religious freedom, or family values identity politics are at the base of such battles.

Unfortunately, what could have become a considered and necessary discussion over the nature of U. S. cultural identity and education practices have degenerated into knee jerk reactionism, political posturing, and futile symbolism.

Renato Rosaldo (1989, p. ix) observes the challenge before us:

> These days questions of culture seem to touch a nerve because they quite quickly become anguished questions of identity. Academic debates about multicultural education similarly slip effortlessly into the animating ideological conflicts of this multicultural nation. How can the United States both respect diversity and find unity?

Unfortunately for intercultural communication teachers we must perform our duties with the culture wars providing the environmental context. Into this potentially hostile environment we must present theories of conflict management, an appreciation for diversity, empathy, and strategies to reduce ethnocentrism, racism, or prejudice. Adding a political agenda to our syllabi may now be a secondary consideration. At this point the subject itself has become politicized.

González (1991) voices a perspective shared by many frustrated scholars (particularly women and minorities) in intercultural communication. I note, both proudly and suspiciously, how the intercultural/international division has a remarkable number of U. S. ethnic and racial minorities and foreign nationals or immigrants. Add to this the relative youthfulness of many who teach intercultural communication and González's frustration is understandable.

Untenured, "other" faculty are bearing the overwhelming responsibility for teaching intercultural or ethnic or gender communication. We both represent and teach otherness in a context where that status is often a liability.

Even when more liberal minded administrators and faculty push for the development of an intercultural communication course it is often the result of political pressure. On a couple of campuses I have seen how intercultural communication and gender and communication have allowed faculty to segregate such issues to those courses rather than incorporating them into their interpersonal, small group, organizational, or rhetoric classes. Kate Madden (1991, p. 62) opines, "I have felt that material on under-represented groups in the U. S. culture should be integrated into the curriculum and not presented solely in specialty courses and areas where they can be too easily marginalized." However, many of our colleagues' habits and preferences run counter to this. Otherness needs to be put in its own place rather than included. This has had the effect to politicize and delegitimize otherness even more. It has also had the effect to mark and denigrate intercultural communication as an area of inquiry.

Intercultural communication can, however, be effectively placed to count as a global awareness, diversity, or multiculturalism course. That is both appropriate and problematic. The former is obvious but the latter situation

can be dangerous. Since intercultural communication is a recent addition to our field it is the open to challenge by students, faculty, administrators, and other interested parties. Positioned on the intellectual periphery, intercultural communication courses tend to center on differences and encourage to pluralize and/or relativize their outlooks of ingroup/outgroup interactions. In an isolationist and nationalist socio-political environment teachers of intercultural courses are easy targets.

The public anger and resentment encouraged by partisan voices struggling over the politics of diversity and multiculturalism have made offering and teaching IC a tendentious and politically loaded act. Traditionalists have challenged the worth and goals of multiculturalism while multiculturalists have labeled traditionalism dated, limited, irrelevant. The Chicago Cultural Studies Group (1992) provide an insightful explanation of multiculturalism, demonstrating its problematic identity and its coherence to the traditional mission of intercultural communication:

> multiculturalism increasingly stands for a desire to rethink canons in the humanities--to rethink both their boundaries and their function. It also stands for a desire to find the cultural and political norms appropriate to more heterogeneous societies within and across nations, including norms for the production and transmission of knowledges. (p. 531)

It is the latter dimension that is most connected to the experience and expression of intercultural communication course content. Both dimensions, however, are open to attacks based on Western and U. S. romantic notions of traditionalism and identity. It is the teacher of intercultural communication--so often untenured, female, and/or a member of minority ethnic and racial groups--who bears the ultimate brunt of such attacks.

The Place of Intercultural Communication in Departments of Communication

Intercultural communication courses and instructors face a second challenge within their departments and colleges. As a fairly recent addition to departments of speech and communication, intercultural communication lacks the support, history, and consistent place in all departments of communication. Worse, its professional presence within entrenched and highly respected doctoral programs is largely absent. Unlike public speaking, rhetorical criticism, or interpersonal communication intercultural communication is perceived ad almost as a luxury: Nice if we can have it but not essential to preparing students in communication studies.

Those committed to the value and necessity of intercultural communication will of course argue that its study is central to preparing students for the present and future. So what. It is not "us" that I am trying to

describe but our colleagues in the more traditional and populated divisions and areas of communication studies. It is they who are most often senior faculty and occupy seats of power (as chairs) and thus have the most influence on courses and hires. The result has been that intercultural communication has not grown as quickly as we have expected given the explosive growth in diversity and identity politics in the last thirty years.

Despite Benjamin Broome's (1986) assertion that "courses in intercultural communication have become increasingly popular in colleges and universities" (p. 296), there is evidence that the area still has a ways to go before it can be considered fully integrated into departments of speech and communication. Moreover, a single course on the books does not necessarily equate to a sustained commitment. Unlike rhetoric/public address, interpersonal, and organizational communication, intercultural communication rarely is split into introductory and intermediary/advanced courses. Intercultural communication is too often simply a luxury.

Previous surveys of the field have documented the relative absence and underdevelopment of intercultural communication curricula in departments. Recognizing IC's status as a newer context of study, Beebe and Biggers (1986) have noted that "basic course in intercultural communication is most commonly offered at the junior level and usually has no prerequisite. The course is generally not required of any

student" (p. 59). Unlike many others areas of the field departments add on intercultural communication and once taught is not developed, in short IC, when included, occupies a place as an upper division elective. An odd place given the practical need for the subject and the interdisciplinary theoretical and methodological complexity.

Of course a reasonable response might be to reexamine the status of Beebe and Biggers' findings. Their own work suggests as much. They note Barna and Jain's (1978) earlier estimation that 200 institutions offered courses in intercultural communication. Thus in eight years there was advancement in eighty-eight institutions representing a 44% increase. Such a history might encourage us to revisit these findings to see if there might be similar progress in the intervening nine years.

Rather than employing a mail survey I used the university catalogs collected through the UMI Microfiche as the base for analysis. Surveying the 1993-94 curricula data of 76 colleges and universities selected from 4 regions (East, South, North, and West) and then divided into subcategories of 4-year programs, 4-year + master's, and doctoral granting institutions, I uncovered data that supports both positive and a negative conclusions of the state of intercultural communication courses. Of the 76 schools analyzed 38 had undergraduate IC courses on the books

(10 lower division; 28 upper division). 16 institutions also had some form of graduate course available.

This data suggests a positive growth with a representation of IC in 50% of the departments. Beebe and Biggers' more extensive and systematic research found IC courses in 18.6% of institutions. Even by generous measures this is a significant positive step. However, there is a second consideration that Beebe and Biggers overlooked that was taken into account in this measure. When the 76 institutions were reviewed for requirements the results were somewhat more negative. Only 3 had a lower division, required IC course. Similarly, only 3 had an upper division IC course that was required. As there was overlap between the two categories in one instance (Iowa State) this suggests that only 5 of 76 schools had an IC as a requirement for the major. Thus, even after the cultural wars and the supposedly brave push for diversity and inclusiveness, only 15% of these institutions had IC as a departmental requirement.

Intercultural communication, therefore, can be seen as having a increasing curricula presence in the sense that institutions have put such courses on the books. Left unanalyzed is the frequency with which these courses are taught or the extent to which IC has been integrated into the cores and interest areas of academic departments. One clear indicator of intercultural communication's place, however, might be IC's absence from the required list of courses.

With all deliberate speed intercultural communication courses have now been designed and listed but apparently not integrated into the majors of most departments of speech and/or communication. Insofar as we are preparing students for a multicultural social, political, and economic reality this is a deficiency that does not serve students well.

Students' Motivations for Taking Intercultural Communication

I will end my analysis with students. As faculty members we know all too well that students do not always operate and agitate in ways that take into account the long term or their best interests. Students, including myself, tend to operate out of habit and the path of least resistance. Given that intercultural communication courses most often occupy a peripheral place, if any at all, within curricula it is natural for intercultural communication courses to not enjoy the support of students. The presence, or absence, of intercultural communication in itself means little to many students. I fear that given the present socio-political climate the habit will get buttressed by an overt antipathy toward intercultural communication (see Gonzalez's argument).

Though I have collected anecdotal evidence regarding students' perceptions about and motivation for taking intercultural communication since I first took the class in 1987, I decided while at the proverbial large midwestern

university to survey students. In 1992 I began teaching an intercultural communication course that was an upper division elective/introductory graduate course (for Social Work and the Counseling Education programs). Over the next two calendar years I taught this course a minimum of three times per year. Enrollments were generally high (above 25 students) with the vast majority (respondents were 102 majors out of 130, approximately 80%) coming from inside of the department.

Prior to my reintroducing IC to the general catalog, intercultural communication was only infrequently taught by adjuncts and an occasional graduate student through the night (adult ed.) program. Hence, to many of the students intercultural communication was a new concept and context. Its relative numerical popularity was largely due to the fortuitous coincidence that the department required undergraduates to take several upper division electives. This intercultural communication course was luckily one such elective in a relatively small pool that had many undergraduates. The forces of supply and demand (of upper division electives) conspired to make the course viable at that point in time.

Because of the frequency of course offerings, and class sizes, I began to survey the students regarding content, concepts, issues, and their attitudes toward the class. Attitudes toward multiculturalism, difference, and

"otherness" are important because these issues are the sine qua non of intercultural communication. Moreover research does indicate that attitudes toward intercultural communication, as course and process, are relevant. McDaniel, McDaniel, and McDaniel (1988) note that attitudes are what transferred least in the training and education of teachers. McDaniel et al. noted that "the demographic findings that younger, minority and undergraduate degreed teachers are more flexible and caring" (p. 30). The key here being minority (other) as necessary for fuller appreciation of the experiences, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for teaching about diversity. This development is reproduced in the preparation of university teachers as well. [Perhaps a survey should be undertaken to assess how many IC professors are minorities, women, internationals, and untenured in comparison to other areas.]

The question of attitudes is central to intercultural communication (Spitzberg, 1989; Wiseman and Koester, 1993). Taken at its course competence revolves around knowledge, motivation, and skill. Given that skill (about communication) and knowledge (about cultures) can be integrated into any communication curricula and the content of intercultural communication courses, motivation for, as well as availability, communicating cross-culturally becomes the key issue. As I often point out to students possessing

knowledge and skill with the proper attitude--the desire to use them--makes the first useless.

Building from this basic and unsophisticated beginning I asked the students "What is your goal in taking this type of course?" The results were interesting. 130 completed surveys (out of a possible 217 were returned). Of these I grouped the responses into three categories--Instrumental, Expressive, Other. Instrumental included taking the course for hours, needed the elective, fit schedule, part of my plan of study, had to take, etc. Expressive was measured by wanting to learn, thought subject matter was interesting, etc. Other included heard instructor was interesting/good, friend was taking it. Students could and did provide responses that could fall in all three categories. The possibility of multiple responses thus pushes the total responses above 130.

The results were interesting and instructive the total responses were 193. Of these 80 were categorized as instrumental and 110 as expressive. Surprisingly only 3 were counted as Other. The results thus indicate that Instrumental attitudes toward the course were present, at least partially, in over 50% of the respondents. Worse when the surveys are grouped by major/non-major the numbers do not look as promising. The 28 non-major surveys indicated Expressive attitudes 27 times with Instrumental responses numbering only 3. Thus for Communication Studies majors the

numbers are: Instrumental 77; Expressive 83; Other 3. Thus Instrumental values were present in 75% of all surveys (77/102).

The results indicate that communication studies majors may not be as positive toward the content, and perhaps the process, of intercultural communication. If students are not sufficiently convinced of the practical and moral value of communicating cross-culturally and appreciating the reality and vitality of diversity then intercultural communication scholars may need to rethink what we are doing and how successful it is. On the positive side it is clear from the surveys that expressive values are present and can be built on. There are important stakes, ethically and morally, in the teaching of virtually all communication subject matter. However, given the perniciousness of racism, homophobia, sexism, nationalism, and ethnocentrism intercultural communication courses face a much sterner challenge. Perhaps this can be attenuated somewhat by having intercultural contexts and concepts introduced in the mainstream of communication research course (interpersonal, small group, organizational) and rhetoric (public address, rhetorical theory and criticism) rather than segregating the inter- and cross-cultural to one peripheral class wherein students may feel hectored or indoctrinated by "politicized" content and perspectives.

Conclusion

I recognize that the tone of this essay may be unnecessarily negative. My intent was merely to remind those of us interested in and challenged by the teaching of intercultural communication that the realities of our institutional and social environments intrude upon the image and process of intercultural communication. We do need to recall that students, colleagues, and administrators may differ in their critique and perception of intercultural communication but all still produce challenges to the legitimacy and centrality of intercultural communication.

I am always heartened by IC colleagues who note, with some glee, that the forces of globalism and U. S. birth and immigration rates will transform this nation into a truly diverse society in the near future. But such celebrations need to be tempered that quantitative presence does not always lead to power, acceptance, or influence. Indicators over the past year reflect animosity and apprehension regarding such changes. In the classroom at my new university I have to explain and defend affirmative action policies, argue that at no time does the Constitution explicitly state that the U. S. needs to be a predominantly white nation, and defend a lecture on different nonverbal behaviors as not an attack on mainstream American values.

Such instances remind me that even the intercultural

course in required in the core it may not be enough, but it at least forces a dialogue with the students and demonstrates a commitment from the department that intercultural communication is central to any Speech and Communication curricula. Perhaps such efforts need to be expanded to graduate schools so that disciplinary and social concerns could be twinned in the training of a future generation of intercultural communication researchers and professors.

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Notes

[1]Jolene Koester and Myron Lustig (1991) go further in providing a framework for developing communication curricula that better fit within the mission and demands of a multicultural university. A useful discussion of teaching intercultural communication is also available in the symposium published in the Southern Speech Communication Journal (1982).